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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION ON FRANCE'S CLOSURE OF MANAR
TV

Summary

-- Lead story in all papers today, December 20, focuses on the response of the Lower and Upper Houses of Parliament to the King's speech from the throne. Another lead story highlights reports about Saddam Hussein's first meeting with his lawyer. Other stories continue to highlight the escalation of violence in Iraq, with one paper reporting allegations of Shia and Sunni leaders of Israeli Mossad responsibility for deadly explosions.

Editorial Commentary

-- "Do they fear our voices so much?"

Columnist Hussein Rawashdeh writes on the op-ed page of center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour (12/20): "Assassinating the voice of Al-Manar TV, be it by banning its broadcast in France or placing it on the American list of terrorism, simply means that the western talk about freedom has failed miserably in all the tests.. The free Arab and Muslim media, just like the free Arab man, the free Arab word and the free resistance, has become 'legitimate' targets of anyone who targets our nation with invasion, deterioration and backwardness.. Al-Manar TV, and even Al-Jazirah TV, will not be the last, just as Baghdad, Fallujah and Rafah are not going to be the last."

-- "The Zionist pressure groups are behind the closure of Al-Manar TV"

Columnist Ibrahim Absi writes on the op-ed page of center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour (12/20): "We had thought that France is the land of free art, free thought, free expression, free opinions and words, and free political stances, and that it had rid itself completely of the enemies of freedom and of the Zionist pressure groups. Yet, here we stand, face to face with a shocking French decision, which is by all means a decision against France, against freedom and against art and thought. Namely, it is the decision to close down the free Arab satellite TV station, Al-Manar, on the pretext that it is anti-Semitic and on the pretext of the hijab [head scarf] worn by the women presenters. Yet, French officials know very well that the reason for the closure, which seems to be out of their hands, is completely different, namely the fact that this free station, which was never anti-Semitic but anti-Zionism, managed, with its limited resources and in a very short period of time, to expose the lies and deception of the Zionist media channels.. The closure of Al-Manar TV is a victory for hate over love, for lies over truth, for slavery over freedom, for Zionism over free France, for the Zionist entity over the Arab nation - the nation that failed to establish an Arab satellite station that would engage the western public opinion, and failed to protect this free Arab station that has brought the Arab voice and image to Europe and the world."

HALE